



Office of the Child Advocate

State of Rhode Island

Katelyn Medeiros, Esq. - Child Advocate

childadvocate.ri.gov

35 Howard Avenue, 3rd Fl. - Cranston, RI 02920

tel: 401.462.4300

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

April 9, 2026

Thank you, Chairman McNamara and members of the Committee, for the opportunity to provide testimony today in support of House Bill 8362 which will expand foster care academic youth report requirements to include information regarding 504 plan eligibility, progress toward graduation, and implementation of further strategies to improve performance outcomes among students in foster care.

My name is Katelyn Medeiros, and I am the Child Advocate for the State of Rhode Island. I am the Director of the agency which serves as the oversight agency to the Department of Children, Youth & Families (DCYF). As the oversight agency, we monitor the case of each child and young adult open to the Department to protect their legal rights and to promote policies and practices which ensure that youth are safe, and that their physical, mental, medical, educational, emotional, and behavioral health needs are met.

Nationally and in Rhode Island, students in foster care experience instability in both living and school environments. Educational disruption is a chronic issue for many children and youth in state care which can result in life-long consequences. Students in foster care are at a higher risk than their peers of low academic achievement, grade retention, and lower graduation rates. Consistent educational disruption often causes students to miss formative opportunities, develop academic gaps, and allows disabilities to go undiagnosed. Addressing these issues can take years and leave students in care significantly behind their peers.

Educational achievement and success are powerful counterweights to the trauma, separation, and instability experienced by students in foster care. In 2021, the Rhode Island General Assembly passed legislation directing superintendents to create an annual report on the academic progress of students in foster care recognizing that youth open to DCYF care face significant obstacles in achieving quality education.

Annual academic reports on students in foster care generated by superintendents provide critical information regarding the educational needs of students open to DCYF and the steps schools are taking to provide students with the tools needed to be successful. However, data shows that students open to DCYF care continue to struggle academically and often fall behind their peers in Rhode Island. The 2024 Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Factbook reported that among the Class of 2023, 51% of students in foster care graduated from high school within four years, compared to 84% of all students, and dropped to 43%, a decrease of 8% in one year among the Class of 2024. Substantial, sustained effort is urgently required to effectively support students in care in Rhode Island.

The proposed legislation outlines enhancements that will provide more detailed information so stakeholders can have a better understanding of the struggles of students in care, the interventions schools are using to help combat those struggles, and the effectiveness of interventions in promoting student achievement. These refinements define clear terminology, aligning all parties on the issues and how they are addressed. Finally, the proposed language clarifies



Office of the Child Advocate

State of Rhode Island

Katelyn Medeiros, Esq. - Child Advocate

childadvocate.ri.gov

35 Howard Avenue, 3rd Fl. - Cranston, RI 02920

tel: 401.462.4300

requirements for superintendent-led remediation plans when interventions do not improve academic outcomes for students in foster care. Providing transparency and accountability in the law will safeguard the long-term academic success of students in state care.

Thank you for your continued support of students in the child welfare system in Rhode Island.

Sincerely,

Katelyn Medeiros, Esq.
Child Advocate